

823 chiefly for marriage. Indeed, marriage is the beginning of adulthood; no Ocimbundu is considered fully an adult until married.

841 Where the initiation camps have not taken hold, i.e. among the great majority of the people, it is the father's sister (*apahāi*) whose duty it is, at least in theory, to tell her brother's daughter how she should take care of herself during the times of menstrual flow. Actually a girl generally learns such things from observation and from girls of the immediately superior age-group, her sisters and cousins. She will not need to be told that during those times a girl or woman must not even touch anything belonging to a man and especially she must have nothing to do with preparing his food. This period is known as 'sitting on the ground' (*oku tumāllā pon*) since that is what a woman is supposed to do at that time. Modern usage has also taken that phrase to mean 'unemployment'.¹

582 In the house which the boy or young man has built for himself, one of the most characteristic customs of adolescence among the Ovimbundu takes place: the trial marriage. There are several Umbundu names for this custom, as *oku tumisa* (lit. to cause to send), referring to the fact that the young man sends a male friend or relative both to ask permission of the girl's mother and also to bring the girl each night to his hut. Names for the correlative but all-inclusive custom are *aponji*, the girl being called *eponji*; and *waini*, the girl being called *ombaini*. A young man may first *tumisa* at about seventeen to eighteen years of age, but he must have acquired enough to make small presents to the girl and to her parents and he must have or have in prospect money or goods sufficient to make the betrothal payment.² This payment is known as *itambele*, 'enticements', or *oku lupala ikulume*, 'chasing away jealousies'. This indicates that the custom of *waini* is definitely regarded as a prelude to marriage. For this reason, the term 'trial marriage' is preferred to that of 'premarital sexual intercourse'.³

[356] The nature of the intercourse, moreover, is carefully circumscribed. 'When the respective parents have agreed, then those of the girl will warn her saying, Should that boy be bad, and want to play with your cloth, even though it be late at night, run away.'³ In such a case the boy's parents would take him to task and require that for the time being he sleep in their kitchen and so under

¹ For early notice of this cf. Magyer, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

² From 10,00 to 30,00 Angolas according to locality, family, status, &c.

³ From a manuscript dictated by B. Kalupetaka of Ngilangi.

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observation, and not in his own house. During that time he will not be allowed to *tumisa*. Or again, 'the girl's parents may warn her saying, Should the boy try to *sting*¹ you, do not let him: do not stay, but run away.'² All informants stress the point that the chief purpose of the custom is that the two young people may come to know each other as well as possible with marriage in view. There are severe sanctions against premarital pregnancy; fines to be paid by the young man or his family, lessened desirability for the girl in marriage, and a distinction in the ceremony between brides who are virgin and those who are not. Proofs of virginity are required on the marriage morning. Those families and regions which have girls' initiation camps include in the procedure a test of virginity.³ There are not the periodic tests of virginity which are found among the Zulus, Mpondos, &c.,⁴ but the Ovimbundu do not expect that the contact will be as close as these other tribes evidently do.⁵ The closest parallel which I know is with the (American) colonial custom of 'bundling'.

It is said that the custom of *spongi* has been in a decadent state for a long time. This is not only because of its having been misunderstood and forbidden by the church or the missions.⁶ Although this is partly the case, the chief difficulty came from the time of the rubber trade (1874-1900) when young men began without ceremony to go to the kitchens to sleep with girls instead of properly arranging matters. Whether their affluence made them reckless (i.e. of expected fines, &c.), or whether they were apeing Europeans or the customs of other tribes, is not known. At any rate, it is said that for large numbers of people this put an end to propriety. Numbers of Europeans began to settle in the country from 1891 (Viye) and 1903 (Bailundu and elsewhere), and from then until now casual relations have very greatly increased year by year.⁷ That the Ovimbundu have held to their traditional forms

¹ *Lamusa*, euphemism for immersion.

² From a statement by R. Kavita Ewambi of Ciyaka.

³ A pullet's egg is used for the test (manuscript by R. Kavita Ewambi).

⁴ Krieger in Schapera, 1937, op. cit., p. 110 f.

⁵ Among the songs which I have collected are two sung by girls to tease the young men and with references to nights spent in *spongi*.

⁶ *Uvuni* has been used in translations for 'fornication' or 'adultery' and used so persistently that it has now nearly come to have those meanings. The *Ovimbundu-English Vocabulary* (1911) gave a correct definition for *spongi* but not for *uvuni*; its references to *uvuni* and *uvuni* are likewise in error, while *tumisa* is not listed.

⁷ Information from R. Kalupeteka and others.

179 of marriage through all these changes, whether with or without
 ● 436 the trial marriage, is a testimony to the vitality of their culture.

883 Young people of the same age-groups are thrown constantly more closely together during adolescence in all their activities and in all aspects of their life. Strengthening of the age-groups is therefore to be expected. New names are taken at this time and the names received at birth discarded so far as possible. Boys used to go off together on hunts, on trading expeditions, &c. The girls work more individually in the fields, but are together in such communal labours as harvests. The preparation of food allows them more sociability and they have the additional advantage of congregating in kitchens not only for meals, but for the night as well. Ceremonial and social occasions are always opportunities for those of the same age-groups to get together. There is a limited amount of fagging of the immediately inferior age-group, but it is not institutionalized save where initiation camps have entered the picture.

883 Folk-lore, music, and the dance have very important roles in the
 535 education of the young. The Bantu are probably among the most
 533 naturally musical of all peoples and the Ovimbundu are perhaps excelled by few other Bantu. Their vocal ability is certainly superior to that of several of their immediate neighbours. Many of their songs are sung in connexion with dances. Other musical forms are road and work songs. Dancing is much enjoyed during adolescence but by no means only at that time, for it is learned in early childhood, very soon after walking, and continued on through life as long as the man or woman can get about unaided. It is a great sight to see toddlers, hardly more than able to walk, climb down off their mothers' backs and try a few steps at dancing; or again, to see a wizened and white-haired old man or woman step out and execute a *pas seul* on some ceremonial occasion. The adolescents, however, enjoy their dancing most, and they are the originators of most of the new steps and new dances which appear from time to time. The dance is of great importance to Umbundu life: social, educational, and ceremonial.

It remains to speak briefly of two institutions, neither of which is practised extensively throughout the country, nor does either seem to be a typical or integral part of Umbundu culture. These are the institutions of initiation at puberty, and the communistic order of the *sakwanzoko* (lit. 'those of the set').

VI. SOCIAL LIFE

SEXUAL RELATIONS

COURTSHIP

There is a certain humor and quaintness of language used by Ngongola in describing sexual relations of the Ovimbundu. So far as possible the interpreter's style of expression has been preserved because of its value in revealing the native attitude. 584 836

When a man begins to like a girl, he looks at her for several days. Perhaps the boy will talk to the girl who will tell him to go to her father and mother. The boy must ask the parents for a friendship, which may last for one or two years. During this time the boy must not do anything to the girl, and if he tries she ought to tell her parents. If a baby were born to them in this time it would be a shameful thing. After the boy has told the parents that he wishes to marry the girl he must find something to give to them. The girl must have agreed to marriage before the boy asks the parents. The first token may be no more than a ball of wax or a present of salt. This token says, "The girl is mine," and no other boy will ask for her because it is understood that she is promised to somebody. In former days there were restrictions against marriage with other tribes, but in eastern Angola at the present day the Ovimbundu occasionally marry with the Vachokue. [582]

Soon the boy will start building a house on his father's plot, because he intends to bring the girl to his father's land. The boy must at this stage make a further present to the parents of the girl. In the old days he would take about five kilos of salt; but now he will take a bottle of Portuguese wine, two or three blankets, or a piece of cloth. The people who carry the present must be the brother, father, or a male cousin of the suitor. These relatives will say, "This is the day we have come for our boy's wife." Then the parents will examine the things. Perhaps they will say, "You must bring a better blanket." The father or the girl's mother's brother must call the relatives of the girl to a council (enjoage) where the relatives of the boy and girl are gathered. 584 481

The parents say, "We are taking these things for our daughter; we hope she will be a good girl and not shame us. She is a good girl to us and we hope she will be a good girl in your house." The girl's parents turn to her and say, "We should like to hear that you are hospitable; give food to your husband's relatives when they visit you." 584 577

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of the girl by her husband, and if she were not a virgin he took a hot stick from the fire and burned a hole through her loin cloth. "The girl began to cry, but she had to take the burned cloth to her mother." In such an instance there does not seem to be an idea of guilt. The husband had accepted something that was damaged, and the payment of a pig by the girl's parents reunited the two young people. In former days, also at present, there are boy and girl companions who sleep together, supposedly without having sexual connections, [836] although they may be seventeen years of age. The girl calls the boy *ombesi*, and he calls her by the same name. The Ovimbundu understand something of the physiology of conception; the woman is, however, regarded as only a receiving vessel. "The man puts something into her which grows." [842]

Husband and wife do not sleep in the same bed during the wife's menstrual period; the wife sleeps on a mat at the side of her husband's bed. A woman who is menstruating never cooks food, but women give mutual aid in this matter. A man with more than one wife sleeps either four nights or seven nights with each; the four-night cycle is more usual than the seven-night cycle among the Ovimbundu. Each wife has a separate hut and kitchen. There is no wife lending, but a visitor may be provided with a widow or even with an unmarried girl. Then the man would have to pay the woman. [841] [595] [937] [574]

Ngonga was able to give information with regard to homosexuality. "There are men who want men, and women who want women." Ngonga says he has heard people talk about it, and "they think this very bad." A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman. The medicine-man will sometimes dress as a woman. Ngonga, who has seen a man dress as a woman, stated that the man arranged his cloth like that of a woman, put palm oil on his hair, and joined the women to pound corn on the rocks. "The other people laughed and spoke bad words to him. His brother, father, and uncle beat him," but without producing reformation. [838]

DIVORCE

There are many grounds on which a man may secure a divorce, but it does not follow that divorce is frequent. On the contrary the evidence indicates that the majority of difficulties are overcome by a compromise between the relations of the husband and those of the wife. The main causes of dissatisfaction with a wife are want of ability in cultivating her garden, physical weakness, a habit of thieving from the gardens of other women, incompetence in cooking, [586]

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Lying is strongly disapproved and the liar is called *ohembi*. The Ovimbundu appreciate hospitality (*wasu*) which also means generosity. A man who is hospitable is said to be *oxuri*. Greediness, which is disliked, is described by the word *oku sops* ("to be greedy"). There are standards of honesty in sales and exchanges. A deceiver in trade is *ohembi*.

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With regard to the relation of the sexes in early years it may be said that, in spite of boy and girl friendships, and the communal sleeping of boys and girls at the home of one of the girls, a man expects to marry a virgin, a point which has been dealt with in describing marriage ceremonies.

Naturally there is a difficulty in obtaining precise information respecting the details of these nocturnal gatherings of boys and girls. Ngonga said that girls inform their parents concerning the house where the night is to be spent, and there is a point of etiquette requiring that girls must not go to a house where boys are staying together.

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Standards of conduct already described under courtship are a result of direct teaching by parents. Marriage rules and a classificatory system of relationships, with its prohibitive decrees, are taught in the home, in the men's council house, and at initiation ceremonies where such exist. In addition to these sources of instruction there is no doubt an unconscious absorption of ideas and standards. The power of suggestion is always at work through everyday examples.

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Apart from demands made by tribal custom and direct instruction there are variable personal standards of modesty. Ngonga states that many lascivious stories are told among men, and when the men are drunk, they tell these to women. "Sometimes the women laugh, but the good women do not like to hear these tales."

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A male commoner when meeting the king bows low, extends his arms, claps his palms and says, "*akasi* ["lion"] *akaku* ["grandfather"]." Only the old people follow the ancient custom of falling on their knees when greeting the king. The Ovimbundu never were in the habit of doing more profound obeisance, but the Vangangella, when greeting one of their kings, rub their chins on the ground and place dust on their chests. Even at the present day a woman or child of the Ovimbundu is expected to kneel when greeting a king, but such an acknowledgment is not now usual in greetings given by a male commoner. The reply of the king to the commoner is "*kaleaga*." This word enters into greetings of all kinds. The literal meaning of the word is "the sea," "king," "god," or "death," but the interpretation

MARRIAGE

groups began to make the socio-geographical function of these marriages no longer the renewal of ties with distant kin but the holding together of the local community no longer held in the firm framework of the old local organization. ⁵⁸² ⁶⁰²

Several explanations can therefore be given for preferential marriages. From the point of view of the man making such a marriage there are economic advantages in the probably lower bridewealth and, formerly, the avoidance of the fine payable on the death of a non-related wife. The marriage itself is more likely to be stable, and a man's children are more likely to stay with him if they have other kin close at hand. The local mobility of the Ovimbundu to some extent assists marital stability, since a bride arriving in a village may well find there other kin than her husband and his relatives, and may find such relatives helpful to her. ⁵⁸²

From an observer's view-point, preferential marriage is important on the village and neighbourhood level by multiplying social links within them. Its importance for the kinship system lies in its giving significance to the distinction between kin and non-kin and in keeping kinsfolk together without either localization of kinship groups or villages with strong headmen.

2. *Husband, Wife, and Household*

Traditionally the Ovimbundu lived chastely till marriage, and there existed sanctions in the form of fines, alterations in the marriage ceremony, and mystically caused illness, against unchastity.⁷ The force of these sanctions has weakened in modern times;⁸ however, many Ovimbundu remain chaste until marriage. ⁸³⁶ ⁶⁸⁴

The age of marriage is about twenty-two for a man, and about eighteen for a girl. In Gumba there is some tendency to marry younger at about 16-17. Villagers in Epalanga ascribed this to contract labour, that is, to the necessity of a contract labourer having to have someone to cook for him. This is a point which will be considered later in reference to the wife's services to her. ⁵⁸²

⁷ Hastings, p. 181. Chibh, p. 113.

⁸ Chibh, loc. cit., and Feldwork.